

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

August 25, 2011

Vice President Biden Wraps Asia Tour, Thanks U.S. Troops for Japan Recovery Aid	1
U.S. Welcomes U.N. Human Rights Vote to Investigate Syria	1
Special Representative Grossman's Op-Ed on Success in Afghanistan.....	2
Sweet Success in Egyptian Exports to the U.S.....	3
Selling More than Olive Oil from Palestinian Farms	4

Vice President Biden Wraps Asia Tour, Thanks U.S. Troops for Japan Recovery Aid

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden met with U.S. troops at Yokota Air Base in Japan to thank them for their assistance in Japan's recovery efforts following the country's devastating earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster earlier this year.

His August 22-24 visit to Japan comes at the end of a nine-day, three-nation tour of Northeast Asia, which included stops in China and Mongolia.

The White House said Biden met with U.S. service members at the base who "delivered relief supplies, assisted search and rescue efforts, provided specialized technical assistance and helped restore critical local infrastructure" following Japan's March 11 disaster. The August 24 White House release said the troops were instrumental in helping their Japanese counterparts clear and reopen points of entry to Japan, including damaged ship ports and airports. The most notable symbol of U.S.-Japanese military cooperation in the wake of the disaster is Sendai Airport, which serves the most severely affected area in the country.

Biden praised that cooperation in remarks to survivors at the airport August 23. He said that within one week of the disaster, Japanese forces and their U.S. counterparts had reopened the airport's runway, enabling the arrival of hundreds of relief workers and more than 2 million tons of supplies. The efforts were part of the U.S. military's Operation Tomodachi ("Friendship") — the single largest humanitarian relief effort in American history.

The vice president said the United States remains committed to working with the Japanese people and that his visit is meant to "reinforce and reassert that commitment of an ally to an ally, a friend to a friend."

Earlier on his trip, Biden met with Prime Minister Naoto Kan in Tokyo, who thanked him for ongoing U.S. assistance for recovery efforts.

Before stopping in Japan, Biden spent a day in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. His August 22 visit to the capital city underscored U.S. support for emerging democracies, according to the White House.

Mongolia's democratization began following the Cold War, and Biden called Mongolia a "shining example for other nations in transition." He praised the country for assuming chairmanship in July of the Community of Democracies, a coalition of democratic countries dedicated to promoting democracy around the world.

While in Ulaanbaatar, Biden met with Prime Minister Sukhbaatar Batbold and President Tsakhia Elbegdorj to discuss strengthening political, economic and cultural ties between the United States and Mongolia.

The first stop on Biden's trip was China, where he met with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, President Hu Jintao, Vice President Xi Jinping and National People's Congress Chairman Wu Bangguo. The leaders discussed bilateral, regional and international issues, including the global economy, energy, military ties, the environment and sustainable development.

Biden also took part in a roundtable discussion with U.S. and Chinese business leaders before leaving Beijing for the southwestern city of Chengdu. There, he met with secondary school students, delivered remarks to university students and held talks with senior provincial officials.

His August 17-22 visit came at the invitation of Xi as the first in a series of planned reciprocal visits between the two vice presidents announced by President Obama and President Hu during Hu's state visit to Washington earlier this year.

The three-nation trip is part of the Obama administration's efforts to "renew and intensify the U.S. role in Asia," according to senior White House officials. Obama will host the 19th annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders in Honolulu November 12-13, and will attend the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit in Bali November 17-19.

U.S. Welcomes U.N. Human Rights Vote to Investigate Syria

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. officials welcomed the U.N. Human Rights Council's August 23 adoption of a resolution that calls for an international inquiry into possible crimes against humanity by the Syrian government. The resolution condemns the regime led by Bashar al-Assad for repeated and systematic atrocities.

In an August 23 statement, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said there are "credible reports that government forces in Syria have committed numerous gross human rights violations, including torture and summary executions, in their crackdown against opposition members."

Syrians have been holding peaceful demonstrations since March demanding that the Assad regime allow political reform and recognize their basic human rights. The

regime has responded with violent crackdowns; U.S. officials have estimated that more than 2,000 Syrians have been killed by their government.

Security forces in Homs reportedly killed six protesters August 23, one day after U.N. officials visited the city to assess humanitarian needs. In her statement, Clinton said the most recent attack "is as deplorable as it is sadly representative of the Assad regime's utter disregard for the Syrian people."

The resolution to condemn Syria passed with 33 in favor, with four against and nine abstentions.

Clinton said the Commission of Inquiry's task of investigating all violations of international human rights law by the Assad regime will "help the international community address the serious human rights abuses in Syria and ensure that those responsible are held to account."

She urged countries around the world to "stand with the Syrian people in their demands for a government that represents the needs and will of its people and protects their universal rights," and said that for the sake of the Syrian people, "it is time for Assad to step aside and leave this transition to the Syrians themselves."

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice said the Human Rights Council's action has shown that "the chorus of international condemnation against the Syrian regime has grown louder and more unified."

In an August 23 statement, Rice said the Obama administration is standing with the people of Syria and will pursue "additional action in the Security Council" to increase pressure on the Syrian regime.

Assad "has refused to lead responsibly and now must go. We have reinforced this message by applying international pressure and targeted sanctions to ensure that his regime feels the consequences of its extreme brutality," she said.

Speaking after the adoption of the resolution, Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, the U.S. representative to the Human Rights Council, said the vote was "a victory for the Syrian people."

The council's action shows a growing consensus that Assad has lost the legitimacy to govern, as well as "the extent to which he is now isolated," she said.

She said the United States has "not been fooled" by Assad's "empty promises of reform and engagement" with the Syrian opposition, saying his regime's

continuing atrocities have "sent a loud and clear message" that the Syrian leader's promises "cannot be trusted."

"We will not stand by silently as innocent civilians and peaceful protesters are slaughtered by security forces. We are working to ramp up pressure on the Syrian authorities to help ensure that the violence ends," Donahoe said.

Special Representative Grossman's Op-Ed on Success in Afghanistan

This op-ed by U.S. Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan Marc Grossman was originally published by McClatchy Newspapers.

Success in Afghanistan: It takes a region

By MARC GROSSMAN

Six months ago this week, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laid out in a speech in New York three foundations for American policy in Afghanistan: a strong military effort to defeat al-Qaida and support Afghans as they secure their sovereignty; a civilian push to promote economic development and good governance; and a diplomatic surge to support an Afghan-led reconciliation process designed to end 30 years of war.

Six months later there is progress to report. The military campaign, supported by the efforts and sacrifices of NATO and other allies and friends, has dealt the Taliban an important blow. Afghanistan's security forces have grown by over a hundred thousand soldiers and police. The transition to Afghan security lead has begun. Because of this progress, President Obama has begun a U.S. military drawdown that will bring 33,000 American soldiers home by the end of September 2012.

There is progress in civilian reconstruction as well. Afghanistan's GDP has tripled since 2001. In 2001, 1 million Afghan children were in school - almost all boys. Today, more than 8 million children attend school - a third of them girls. Eighty percent of Afghans have access to basic health-care facilities, almost twice as many as in 2005. Half of Afghan families now have telephones; almost no one had a phone a decade ago.

We are creating the diplomatic surge Clinton called for by leveraging a broad range of contacts at many levels across Afghanistan and the region, including preliminary outreach to members of the Taliban. As part of this diplomatic effort the United States has focused special attention since February on the need for regional support for Afghanistan. Pakistan and India, Iran and China, Russia and the Central Asian republics would all benefit from an independent and stable Afghanistan integrated into a secure and prosperous South and Central Asia.

There are specific regional actions to applaud. Both Pakistani and Indian leaders have announced their support for Afghan-led reconciliation. In June, Russia, China and India joined the United States in voting to split the United Nations' Taliban and al-Qaida sanctions regimes, an endorsement of Afghan efforts to reconcile with insurgents ready to break ties with al-Qaida, renounce violence, and accept the Afghan Constitution, especially the rights of women and minorities.

Pakistan has a leading regional role to play and has legitimate interests in any reconciliation process. Islamabad has formed a Joint Peace Commission with Afghanistan, and is in regular contact about the peace process with Afghanistan and the United States. Islamabad can demonstrate its further support for Afghan-led efforts by preventing Pakistani territory from being used to destabilize Afghanistan.

Two important international conferences - a summit of regional leaders hosted by Turkey in Istanbul in early November and the "Bonn+10" conference chaired by the Afghan Government and hosted by Germany in December - should build further regional and international support for Afghanistan.

In Istanbul, Afghanistan's neighbors can commit to a stable and independent Afghanistan and define a mechanism to judge how well they live up to their commitments. In Bonn, the international community can endorse this regional vision and reaffirm a long-term investment in Afghanistan.

One other point is clear: there will be no secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan inside of a secure, stable and prosperous region without private sector fueled sustainable economic growth from Central Asia to Bangladesh. Regional power, transport, and transit infrastructure and new trade agreements will build economic connections. A vision for this "New Silk Road," launched in Bonn, would bind the region together and help Afghanistan attract new sources of investment and consumers for its goods. Afghanistan and Pakistan have just implemented a new transit trade agreement. Expansion of this agreement to Central Asia, and perhaps even to India, would create further incentives for regional cooperation.

The region's capacity to overcome old suspicions requires confidence in the international commitment to see through the current mission in Afghanistan. A new Strategic Partnership Declaration will outline the U.S. commitment to supporting Afghanistan's security forces and civilian institutions. The United States seeks neither permanent military bases in Afghanistan, nor a long-term military presence that aimed at power-projection or threatening Afghanistan's neighbors.

People in Islamabad, Astana, New Delhi and Washington have an interest in achieving a secure, increasingly prosperous Afghanistan at peace with its neighbors, and a region free from al-Qaida. Only the Afghan people can reconcile with the insurgency. But Afghanistan's neighbors must support their efforts.

There is hard work to do in each of the three areas Clinton highlighted last February and again in India in July. Building on these actions will require difficult choices and consume enormous diplomatic energy. A status report six months from now can show further progress if the region comes together to support Afghanistan.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Marc Grossman is the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Sweet Success in Egyptian Exports to the U.S.

By Jeff Baron | Staff Writer

Washington — Hatem M. Zaki has advice for Egyptian businesses thinking about exporting to the United States: Learn the rules and try it.

Zaki is a regional export manager for El Rashidi El Mizan, a 120-year-old company based near Cairo that he said dominates the Egyptian market for tahini and halvah; it expanded into all-natural jams about four years ago. The company had exported in small quantities for decades, but Zaki said he and some colleagues have helped build exports into a major part of the business. The United States is "our Number 1-sales area" for jams, he added.

The weakness of the U.S. economy is, if anything, a plus for Egyptian companies, Zaki said. "The American consumer now would prefer to have a cheaper product with a good quality rather than a very-high-quality branded product with a high price. So a big layer of the consumers in the U.S. started to shift from the European products, for example, like the French jams and so on, to the Egyptian. It has a very reasonable quality and at the same time much better price."

In an interview July 12 at the Summer Fancy Food Show at the Washington Convention Center, Zaki said the U.S. market can be a challenge for a newcomer in part because of something he learned in business school: Each culture has distinctive ways of doing business.

"In the Middle East, we have to use what we call the warm approach," he said. "We have to meet the customer. We have to go to dinner. We have to be very close to do business. Otherwise, business will not complete."

Japanese buyers, he said, want to immerse themselves in details of the product they are buying and see photos of

the factory that produces it. The American approach, on the other hand, is “very practical” and much simpler: “As long as you send me the correct product, it’s OK.”

U.S. rules for imported foods can be a challenge, Zaki said: “For example, one of the very basic things is the labeling on your product.” Even the size of the typeface used for the nutritional facts is dictated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). “Everything must be in good order,” he said. “Otherwise, you will not get in.”

Egyptian exporters have to understand that the U.S. rules are firm — there is no way to bribe an inspector or persuade a decisionmaker to get around the rules. Zaki said U.S. rules are meant to ensure high standards for food safety. “The FDA is doing a really good job here because in the United States you can be very safe choosing whatever product from any shop, whether it is expensive or high-end or low-end,” he said.

Zaki picked up a jar of jam from his display at the food show. He said that Dollar Tree, a major U.S. chain of discount stores, is selling the 340-gram jar for just \$1, “and you cannot imagine what are the critical points it passed by to reach the end consumer.” The retailer requires inspections by a quality-control assurance company in addition to FDA approval, Zaki said. Another distinctive feature of the U.S. imported food market is its reliance on brokers, who assume liability for the safety of the food, Zaki said.

Exporters benefit along with retailers and consumers, he said, because the system of inspections puts the quality of their products beyond doubt and results in fewer canceled contracts.

Today, Zaki said, Egyptian exporters and their U.S. customers face difficulties because Congress has been slow to renew the Generalized System of Preferences, under which importers usually pay low tariffs on Egyptian products. Authorization of the program expired at the end of 2010.

But like El Rashidi El Mizan, Egyptian companies are nevertheless building an American market. The Egyptian Food Export Council reports that food exports to the United States were up 21 percent in 2010 from the year before, to \$74 million in total sales.

Selling More than Olive Oil from Palestinian Farms

By Jeff Baron | Staff Writer

Washington — The Palestinian olive oil that Nasser Abu Farha displays in tall bottles is only part of what he sells to American and European consumers. He also sells a way of doing business: treating his suppliers fairly and helping them to be good stewards of the earth they farm.

“Canaan Fair Trade is a mission-based company that seeks, through business, to empower small and marginalized farming communities of Palestine caught in the midst of conflicts so they sustain their livelihoods and their farms,” he said. “So we combine both fair trade — social accountability — with organic production — environmental accountability and sustainability — into what we call a sustainable trade model through which about 1,700 farming families are benefiting right now.”

If Abu Farha’s explanation sounds a bit like a college lecture, there is a reason: He received a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin in anthropology and international development and planned to teach at an American university. His concern for his fellow Palestinians got in the way.

“I was doing my research for my Ph.D. in Palestine, and I saw the farmers were hurting severely from plummeting prices of olive oil. So I thought of fair trade as a vehicle to open market access to the farmers,” he said. “That needs to be combined with environmental sustainability.”

Canaan Fair Trade’s policy of protecting farmers from disastrous drops in the market makes it distinctive. “We guarantee the farmers a minimum sustainable price, a price that allows them to make a living off of their farming activities,” Abu Farha said. The farmers, in turn, commit to pay their workers good wages. The olive oil is organic and comes from family operations — none larger than 10 hectares — instead of olive plantations. Other Canaan Fair Trade products, such as tapenades, sun-dried tomatoes, spice blends and maftoul, the Palestinian couscous, are the work of 200 women’s collectives.

Abu Farha said the United States was his biggest market from the start and accounts for 55 percent of his sales, with the rest going to about 15 other countries, mostly in Europe. The Palestinian Territories enjoy tariff-free trade with the United States. “It’s an added incentive,” Abu Farha said. “The U.S. tariff on olive oil is not high; it’s 5 percent only,” he said, but “every percent helps.”

Price is only part of the equation. Abu Farha said the businesses and consumers he wants to reach in the West are those looking for “ethical sourcing” and hoping to improve the lives of others with the money they spend.

Canaan Fair Trade had a booth at the Summer Fancy Food Show at the Washington Convention Center in July to provide a link between those socially conscious buyers and Palestinian farmers. “We don’t just sell the product,” Abu Farha said. “We are not here in this show to strike a deal here or there. We build partnerships, long-term partnerships, with companies that have an interest to be invested in the life of our farmers. When we reach that, we reach a partnership. We don’t reach that, we don’t

even have a sale.”

Since setting aside his academic career to start Canaan Fair Trade in 2005, Abu Farha has divided his time between the Palestinian Territories and Wisconsin, where his wife and three children live. He said they are supportive because they know how meaningful the venture is to him.

“This business is connected to thousands of people, and I like what it’s doing” for Palestinian families, he said. He added that he’s also giving buyers in the West an understanding of Palestinian agriculture, which he called “a window to Palestinian culture.”

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provides assistance to Canaan and other Palestinian producers to help them develop their product lines and to explore new markets. Recognizing the importance of the Fancy Food Show for specialty food producers, USAID worked closely with six Palestinian companies, including Canaan, to prepare them for participation in the show. Those companies are currently negotiating \$2.5 million in deals to export fresh and processed food products.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)